

Depression

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Summary: Post-War, pre-epilogue chapter. I cannot believe that Naruto just bounced back with no problem from the horrors of the war. I am also interested in how some of the canonic pairings actually developed. Haven't seen the movies, or the anime, just the manga. TW: self-harm/depression/suicidal thoughts. Pairings aren't the focus, just extra. NaruHina, SasuSaku, SaIno, ShikaTema.

1. Chapter 1

**A/N: I somehow doubt that Naruto was just fine right off the bat after the war. I also have a desperate need to explore how some of the canonic couples got together. In case you missed the warning in the description, this is an intense self harm/depression/anxiety/suicide fic. Do not sacrifice your well being to read this little thing. You are worth more than that. I guess I can't really judge though, because I do that. Thus, this fic. I love you guys. Please, please, please know that I love helping people even if all they need is listening ear. My inbox is always open and I check it often. Updates will not be often or reliable. Read, review and enjoy!**

Chapter One: Loss of appetite

_Loss of appetite: a decrease in __any of the instinctive desires necessary to keep up organic life; especially the desire to eat__

"This mission is highly classified." Kakashi emphasized this by glaring at Naruto. The blond ninja tried to look innocent, failed, and cracked a grin.

"No worries, Kakashi-sensei." Off to the side, Sasuke smirked. Sakura, of course, ignored them both. Sai could only marvel. He'd thought Team 7 was effective when he'd been the third member. With Sasuke as the fourth, they were unstoppable, despite two of the members being short an arm.

"We've uncovered, due to an in depth interrogation of an old acquaintance of Sasuke-kun's that Orochimaru and Kabuto had a super secret lab where they kept an especially dangerous specimen, or as I prefer, victim." Sasuke frowned ever so slightly, Naruto looked angry and Sakura cracked her knuckles. They glanced at each other for the briefest instant, then Naruto spoke. No one thought to look at Sai.

"Where, when do we leave, any other details we need to know?" Kakashi's eyes scrunched, showing the grin beneath his mask. He held out a sealed scroll.

"Here's a map, attuned to Sakura-chan's chakra signature so enemies can't read it. You leave as soon as you can be ready. Be aware that we don't know much about the experiment, only that it is female, slightly younger than the four of you and that she was in a comatose state before the War. Whether that holds true is unknown. Capture only, unless it proves to be an uncontrollable weapon of mass destruction." He saluted lazily. "Good luck."

Sai started to follow the others out, but was stopped by Kakashi's outstretched arm.

"Hang back a second." He said. Sai obliged, standing with his eyes meeting Kakashi's, arms hanging relaxed at his sides. His true expression was perfectly masked by his pleasant smile. Kakashi studied him, then placed a hand on his shoulder.

"How are you getting along with the new team member?" Sai kept his smile.

"Fine. He is a skilled addition to the team." His voice was neutral, unconcerned. Kakashi wasn't an idiot.

"And you've been contributing on missions?" It could have been taken as an insult, but Sai knew what he was really asking. He nodded.

"As much as I can, Sensei." Kakashi studied him a moment, then smiled and released him.

"Good." He gave Sai's shoulder a hard pat. "Go on. I think they said something about meeting at the front gate in half an hour." So Sai escaped.

Sasuke, even after a month of the arrangement, wasn't sure how to feel about living in the same apartment as Naruto. He had his own room, Naruto kept the cupboards stocked with non-ramen meals for him, didn't bug him overmuch. In fact, Naruto seemed to be going out of his way to act mature and give Sasuke his privacy.

At the same time though, Sasuke couldn't help but be annoyed at the way Naruto randomly said something like, "Remember the time I tied you up so I could talk to Sakura?" Or "Remind me to tell you sometime about the time we saved Gaara." He never pushed Sasuke to talk about it. He'd just mention it, then fall back into whatever he was doing, which increasingly involved sitting or laying around, staring into the distance with a smile on his face and pain in his eyes.

And the way Naruto would suddenly walk into the bathroom, shut and

lock the door, and not come out for just barely longer than was normal. Sasuke wondered if something was wrong. Not that he was worried.

So when, after packing what he needed, Naruto closed himself in the bathroom, Sasuke got close enough to overhear what was happening. At first, nothing, then the water ran and there was splashing. Then a voice, so shaky and scared that it almost couldn't have been Naruto's, spoke.

"You're strong. Sasuke-kun, Sakura-chan and Sai-kun are strong. Kurama is strong. You can save this girl. It won't happen again. No one will die."

Sasuke felt something cold settle in the pit of his stomach. He thought back, remembering how ramen had been disappearing less and less from the cupboard. He had assumed Naruto was eating out more often. He saw again, in his mind's eye, those painful, wistful looks the blond ninja got sometimes. He frowned. Maybe he should tell somebody.

Then he shook his head. Everyone was a little shook up after the War. Naruto would snap out of it. Silently, he crept to the door, swinging his pack over his shoulder.

"Come on, dobe." He called.

"Oh yeah, I'm ready!" Naruto's normal confident voice rang through the apartment, the toilet flushed and Naruto came out, bouncing on his toes and grinning. "Come on, Sasuke-teme." And like a rush of wind, he was out the door, leaping from rooftop to rooftop with bubbly enthusiasm. Sasuke followed, more controlled, more serious.

Sakura and Sai were waiting at the gate and Naruto greeted them with his usual exuberance. Sasuke watched him carefully, analyzing Naruto's every motion, every expression. Was it just in his mind, or was Naruto avoiding touching his teammates? Was it just a trick of the light or were Naruto's eyes duller and sadder than usual? Had Naruto winced when Sai shook his hand or was that just his typically mobile facial expression?

Sakura noticed Sasuke's attention, caught his eye, and raised her eyebrow questioningly. Sasuke shook his head almost imperceptibly, letting his eyes harden slightly to tell her not to pry. She nodded.

"Let's get going, boys." She said. "Head southeast."

"I'll take point." Sasuke said.

"I've got our rear." Naruto volunteered.

"Move out." Sakura said. And with a whoosh, they moved, Sai a bit ahead of Sakura in the center.

They made good time, bantering back and forth. Naruto was, as usual, the jokester, although as time went on, he spoke less and less. When they stopped for lunch, Naruto came into the clearing and stumbled, catching himself on his hand and knees. As the others glanced at him,

he jumped up, laughing sheepishly.

"I've got to learn to watch my feet." He rubbed the back of his head. Sakura and Sai shrugged it off, but Sasuke only pretended to look away, filling his canteen in the river. He activated his Sharingan, watching Naruto. The blond ninja stood there, smiling faintly, fist clenched so tightly his knuckles turned white. His eyes, usually crystalline clear and full of joy, seemed clouded and drowned in sorrow.

But in the instant it took Sasuke to turn, Naruto was grinning, posture casual and relaxed. He walked forward with his canteen, walking past Sasuke and crouching to the river. Sasuke relaxed his eyes, shaking his head slightly. Either he was reading too deeply into this, or something was very wrong.

He noticed that although Naruto took food, every other bite ended up thrown into the bushes when he thought no one was looking. The bites he actually put into his mouth were chewed slowly and swallowed, but after each, he looked at what remained with an emotion akin to fatigue. But every time someone looked at him, he was all smiles and full mouth, saying stupid things while crumbs spewed from his mouth. His act was nearly perfect, except that Sasuke was a master of observation.

So he was surprised when Sakura pulled him aside, on the pretext of consulting him about the map, and looked him in the eye.

"Have you noticed anything different about Naruto recently?"
Sasuke kept his face blank.

"What do you mean?"

"Like, does he eat that little at home? Has he been that clumsy for a while? Has he been sick?" Sasuke was tempted to tell her his theory, but it really wasn't his business. Sakura grabbed his wrist, hard, then released it when her remembered about Sasuke's aversion to touch. Instead, she glared at him, stubborn and tenacious despite his Sharingan and Rinnegan. It was a nice change to everyone looking down at his approach.

"He's our friend. It's our job to help him." Sasuke's eyes flashed, an instant of shocked fury that she seemed to read him so well. Then, though he couldn't tell why, the anger drained away. He relaxed.

"Something is wrong." He briefly recounted what had happened before they left, then his observations since. Then he asked, "Before I showed up at the battle, did someone important to him die?" Sakura was about to ask him how he'd missed it, then realized Sasuke had left as soon as physically possible after the war, only coming back about a week ago. Combine that with his anti-social tendencies and it was no wonder.

"Neji Hyuga-san jumped in front of Naruto-kun to save him. He died right there in Naruto-kun's arms. There was nothing anyone could have done." She blinked back tears. "He was one of Naruto-kun's best supporters and friends ever since Naruto-kun beat him in the Chuunin exams. He was a genius and a true hero." Sasuke bowed his head, an inadequate and overly simple gesture of respect for a fallen hero.

Then he spoke.

"Naruto blames himself. He's punishing himself." He looked up into Sakura's eyes. "His head is not in the mission and he's going to get himself killed. Especially since he's not eating enough." Sakura nodded.

"So we need to either stage an intervention or send him back to Konoha." Sasuke frowned.

"Or we can use Sai-kun's ink birds to send a message to Kakashi-sensei. We'll come up with an excuse to stay here and Kakashi-sensei can come get him." Now Sakura looked troubled.

"Why all the subterfuge?" She asked. "Why would we lie?"

"Because if we confront him, he'll deny it and it will frighten him. He doesn't realize how depressed he is. Besides, we don't want him to think we agree that it's his fault, or to be wandering around on his own like that." Sakura nodded, unhappy but recognizing the need.

"Fine. What excuse should we use?"

"This one." All at once, he doubled over, hissing. Sakura, concerned, crouched next to him.

"Sasuke-kun, what's wrong?" He straightened slowly, brushing her off with a grimace.

"I'm fine." Then he bent over again, seemingly forced over by pain.

"Sasuke?" Naruto dropped what he was packing and ran over. "What's going on?" Sasuke ground his teeth, tightening his abdomen to make the words sound forced.

"Did youâ€| drink waterâ€| from the stream?" He'd been watching. He knew Sai and Sakura were still drinking Konoha water, and Naruto hadn't drunk from the canteen he'd filled at the stream. All three shook their heads. He breathed heavily, mildly embarrassed by his act, but with Naruto's agonized expression burned into his mind's eye.

"Well don't. There's something in the water." Sakura had picked up on the act by now. She knelt beside him, professionally checking his pulse and running her chakra-lit hand over his abdomen. He found it hard not to smile and relax at the warm energy from it.

"Sit down. I'm going to test the water." She settled him against a tree, dragging Naruto and Sai with her.

"Naruto, you got water from the stream, right? Bring me your canteen. Sai, I need you to send a message." Naruto rushed off and Sai pulled out his scroll and brush. Sakura carefully worded the message, although Sai looked at her strangely.

Sensei

U sick. Retrieval necessary. More info _on personal arrival.

Urgent. He kept his promise._

â–š _7_

Naruto ran up, panting slightly, and held out his canteen. While Sai sent off the message, Sakura carefully poured a little water into her palm, sniffed it, inspected it, tasted a little bit and then spat it out. She ran chakra through it while Naruto watched anxiously. Finally, she sighed.

"There must be a diseased carcass upstream." She said. "The rotting contaminated the water." She poured Naruto's water out. "Boil some water for drinking. Tell Sai to set up camp and gather firewood. I'm going to check on Sasuke." Naruto nodded, walking away. Sakura walked over to join Sasuke.

"How are you feeling?" She asked.

"I'm fine." He grumbled, attempting to get up. Sakura pushed him back down.

"Rest. Poisoning like this is no joke." She touched his forehead. "Fever already." She frowned, although his forehead was cool. This act was starting to bother her.

"I hate this." He growled. She knew he agreed with her.

"I know you do." She murmured, letting him drink from her canteen. "Do you feel nauseous? Dizzy?" He nodded vaguely, his attention focused on following Naruto in the clearing.

"Are you sure Naruto's going to be okay?" He asked quietly. She nodded.

"He'll be fine. Don't worry. Help is on the way. Now stop talking and lay still. You're still recovering from losing your arm because you didn't listen to my advice and stick around to rest." He grumbled a bit more, but lay back and closed his eyes.

**A/N: I'm coming into this story much more prepared. I already have over fifty pages handwritten. All I have to do is type it up with minor, on-the-fly edits and I'm good to go. Let me know what you think, and my specific question I'd like feedback on for this chapter is characterization. How do you think I did on the characters so far? Outside of that, I'm a great listener, I appreciate constructive criticism and question about completely unrelated topics as well. My inbox is always open! Love you guys.**

2. Chapter 2

**A/N: Wow, 36 visitors in four days? 2 followers, 5 favorites and 3 reviews? I'm so flattered and happy. You guys deserve another chapter super quick! Since I already have 50+ pages written, I guess I'll just type this up for you guys. Enjoy, review and check out my multi-fandom tumblr account under the same handle. Thanks!**

**TW: Self-harm, blood, self hatred in this chapter!**

Chapter 2: Apathy

Apathy: a feeling of not having much emotion, interest or concern

By the time Kakashi showed up just as darkness fell, Sasuke was thoroughly sick of three things: Acting sick, sitting still and Naruto's constant worried attention. He'd almost never gotten sick as a child and had always recovered quickly from all but the most severe injuries, so laying around when he didn't even feel sick made him feel antsy and annoyed. Only Naruto's pain filled eyes and the memory of his broken voice in the bathroom kept Sasuke acting.

When their Sensei arrived, Sakura led him over and the real situation was quickly and furtively explained. Kakashi made a show of handing Sakura a bottle and rattling off a list of ingredients. She made Sasuke drink it (it was just water), waited half an hour, then announced that Sasuke would be recovered by morning. Naruto grinned, relief clear in his features.

"Naruto-kun." Kakashi said, once they'd gathered around to start cooking dinner. "I need you to come back with me." Naruto frowned.

"Why?"

"Because I may be your co-Hokage until you're ready to do it yourself, but there are some things I shouldn't choose alone, especially when the situation is one you need to learn to deal with." Naruto sighed.

"Fine. If it's for the good of Konohagakure." Now everyone had no doubts that something was wrong, because Naruto hadn't contended at all with leaving a mission to save a hurt girl. They watched, concern masked, as he stood and grabbed his pack. He walked toward Sasuke.

"Just sayin' goodbye." Sasuke made a show of cracking an eye open as Naruto approached, then awakening and easing himself carefully upright. He studied Naruto's face.

"What's wrong?" He asked, halfway hoping to get a complete explanation. Naruto shrugged.

"Konoha needs its Hokage." He said quietly. Sasuke nodded.

"Don't worry about the mission. We've got it." Naruto smiled wanly.

"I know. Be safe." He turned to go. Then, over his shoulder, "Sai's a great guy. Use him." Then he leaped into the trees and was gone, Kakashi on his heels.

"It's over." Sasuke said after a moment, standing and stretching. He walked into the clearing, surprising Sai. Then the former Foundation member put the pieces together and nodded.

"He'll get better now." He said softly, dumping water over the fire, then kicking dirt over the steaming coals. "Let's go." The three shouldered their packs and shot off into the night.

To Naruto's surprise, Kakashi dropped to the ground from the treetops only a few miles from where they'd started. Assuming he sensed danger, Naruto followed, landing more heavily than he'd meant to and panting slightly as he drew back to back with his mentor.

"What is it?" He breathed. Kakashi simply walked away. Naruto followed, puzzled. He studied Kakashi's posture. His head stayed in its relaxed, forward position, none of the barely perceptible motions that suggested he was glancing about watchfully. His hands were jammed into his pockets, fisted instead of loose and flat in preparation for throwing shuriken.

The younger shinobi frowned. If they weren't about to fight, why had Kakashi dropped to a walk on the ground? He was about to ask again when they entered a clearing. A wooden building, strangely reminiscent of Yamato's wood jutsu, stood there, lit inside and warm.

Kakashi entered, waiting to close the door until Naruto was inside. Naruto looked around, seeing the two futons rolled against the wall, the simple foods steaming by the fire and the back door opened to look at a small porch and stream. It was peaceful, content, but Naruto felt only empty disinterest. He sat on the side of the fire away from the food, feeling vaguely nauseous. Kakashi joined him, taking off his vest and weapon pouches and setting them aside, still close enough to touch. He sighed.

"This is nice." Naruto attempted after a moment of silence.
"Important meeting?"

"You could say that." Kakashi drawled, stretching out in the perfect image of lazy relaxation.

"With who?" Naruto asked, dreading quiet time, where he would be left with his thoughts.

"You." Naruto raised an eyebrow, feeling a distant chill run through him. He couldn't identify the cause.

"About?" Kakashi looked over at him, a searching look in his eyes that made Naruto feel transparent even now that Kakashi had no Sharingan. He shifted, discomfort spreading through him.

"They weren't kidding. You really do have no idea." His sensei said musingly. Naruto felt a flare of anger and clenched his fist, jutting his jaw out stubbornly. Just as he was about to explode, the fury dissipated, replaced by a deep fatigue. He sighed, slumping over.

"Whatever." He murmured, tone flat, eyes half closed as they looked unseeingly in the flames. Kakashi felt that defeat like a punch to the gut, injecting ice into his veins. He visibly winced. Never, ever did Naruto back down from a challenge like that. Never did he just let anger go without someone getting yelled at and/or punched. It almost hurt him physically to see his student, the young man who felt like a son to him, who had held Kakashi up when he was questioning everything he believed, so broken.

"Naruto-kun." He said quietly, voice flooded with concern. "Is there anything you want to talk about?" Naruto didn't respond, didn't move.

The older ninja leaned forward, allowing his shoulder to brush his student's. At the touch, Naruto closed his eyes, body tensing. He seemed to be trapped between bolting away and falling into his Sensei's arms. Kakashi put his left arm over the blond's shoulders, trying to put all of his worry, his affection, into the touch.

Naruto sucked in a breath, sounding almost pained. His body was so stiff that Kakashi could almost hear his joints creaking, his muscles straining. He was breathing shallowly, seeming to be terrified that if he moved, the pressure on his shoulder would lift, leaving him bereft again.

"I'm not going anywhere." Kakashi said. Naruto glanced up at him, surprise mixing with a poisonous flow of raw hatred and grief and fear. Kakashi smiled softly, tightening his grip. Naruto started to lean in, to loosen up, to give up his stoicism. Then all at once, he pulled back, jumping to his feet. He was shaking, eyes wild, face pale.

"What's wrong?" Kakashi kept his voice calm, firm. Naruto looked through him, seeming to see something that wasn't in Kakashi's reality. The older ninja put up his hands, palms out, and stood up. Naruto was breathing heavily, abject terror plain on his features. It stabbed Kakashi that his student was so afraid of him.

"You can't promise that." He whispered. Kakashi was briefly confused. His mind replayed the last few minutes, catching on his own statement. _I'm not going anywhere. _Not afraid of him then, only inevitability of grief and loss. He kept his voice calm.

"You're right." He said. "Things happen, and I'm not as young as I was." Naruto's eyes flicked up to him, pale sky boring into dark night. "But I can promise you that I won't leave you by choice." He said, taking a slow step forward. Naruto shivered, leaning backward, but holding his ground. His voice was filled with hopeless, trembling misery when he spoke.

"You won't have a choice." He choked. Kakashi waited, holding Naruto's gaze with his own. He could see Naruto's palm and fingers dripping blood where his nails were digging into the flesh from the tightness of his fist. "Everyone around me dies or gets hurt or leaves." He said, resignation in his tone and a conviction in his eyes that suggested he'd said this to himself too often to count.

"That's not your—" Kakashi tried to soothe him, starting to feel entirely unequal to the task of getting Naruto back to calm, but Naruto kept on as though he hadn't said anything.

"My pa, my ma, Neji-kun, Jiraiya-sensei, Asuma-sensei, Old Man Third. They're all dead. Not to mention the tens of thousands of shinobi who died in the war. Hinata-chan, Shikamaru-kun, Gaara-kun, Sakura-chan, Lee-kun, Sasuke-teme, and on and on. They all got hurt fighting. I should have been stronger. I could have saved them, should have." His gaze sharpened, looking straight into Kakashi's eyes, clarity making a path to the agony he was feeling.

"And if you stay by me, you'll die too." He finished, then bolted for the open back door. It took a lot to stun Kakashi, but these

statements slowed him enough that by the time he got into the yard, Naruto's desperate flight had taken him far enough that Kakashi couldn't hear him, couldn't see which branches had been moved by his passing. He summoned his ninja dogs, begging them to find him. They sniffed around, then reported that Naruto must have made multiple shadow clones because his scent went in every direction. Kakashi felt a nauseous wave of panic roll over him.

"Each of you follow one. Report to me when you find the original." The dogs nodded and were gone, sensing their master's urgency. Kakashi watched their progress for a few seconds, then began to pace. The motion did nothing to calm him, but it was better than sitting still.

Naruto flew through the treetops, barely feeling the sting of the branches he didn't try to avoid whipping his face. In fact, there was a certain relief to it. Each sting on his face, each tickling sensation of blood oozing over the undamaged portions of his skin, took his mind off of the painful thudding of his heart and the guilt that made him sick.

He ran and leaped until he burst out into a wide clearing with a pile of boulders in the center. A dry, dead streambed lay around it, flat and barren and strangely devoid of any grass. Naruto's keen eyes, sharpened yet further by his deep desire to be hidden, spotted a crevasse in the rocks, seemingly shallow and impassable. In a burst of impulse, he scrambled up, finding that his body just barely fit. Once he got into the crack, he slid straight down into an enclosed, semi-dark hole.

A shaft of moonlight cut down from a smaller hole above, and leaves and pine needles had blown in, creating a soft nest at the bottom. It was still, the relaxing smell of dry earth and autumn surrounding him. Naruto felt the clawing sensation of panic settling. For the first time since he and Kakashi had entered that cabin, he felt full clarity return to his mind. With it came an awareness of a sensation of tender fragility in his chest, like his heart had been turned to glass and a single breath would shatter it.

He sat in the cushioning dead foliage, letting the cool wind whistling through the hole he'd crawled through brush his face. His thoughts returned to his conversation with Kakashi-sensei. It was a little fuzzy after his sensei had sat down and completely blank after he'd made that comment about Naruto not knowing something. He was used to being unaware of certain principles, of techniques and histories and chakra balances. He was, after all, an idiot. But there was something different about this question.

He felt a sudden stinging in his half-arm and looked down to see his fingernails gouging deep furrows into the flesh. He lifted his hand off, simultaneously fascinated and disgusted by the flesh and blood dripping down his fingers. He studied the red, entranced by the patterns that formed in the grooves of his palm. He could hear Kurama inside of him, concern and fury in his tone. He frowned. Was he crazy to think wish that the fox had been sucked out of him forever, along with his spirit?

He heard the scrabbling of nails on stone outside and froze, adrenaline shooting through him. His heart began pounding, fast and hard, pumping blood out of the oozing wounds. A snuffling sound came

at the crack he'd crawled through. He resisted the urge to whimper, to crawl backwards and cower in the corner. Any motion, any sound could bring the beast down on him.

Then, as he was reawakened to the sensation of blood on his hand, he felt a heavy weight of resignation settle on him. He was going to be found and there was nothing he could do about it. They'd drag him back, surround him with people he could hurt, people he cared about. Apathy and helplessness drained the panic from him, leaving him numb.

He slumped, vision blurring, breaths slowing. He shivered against the dry, soft ground, mind slipping into its darkest corner, far from the outside world. Vaguely, he heard a familiar voice, felt gentle fingers brushing his head as a sudden chill washed over him. He closed his eyes, barely noticing the change from dark silhouettes and silver edging to utter black.

**A/N: Just so you guys know, I'm taking his inner emotions and what depression and anxiety feel like from my own experience. It's strangely soothing to put the feelings at a distance with words that are so poignant and meaningful to me. I apologize if they do not match your own experience or seem overly dramatic. My specific question for this chapter is does my syntax (sentence and paragraph structure) flow well? Is it easy to read? Let me know. My inbox is always open. Love you guys!**

End
file.